



Digital Records: *Characteristics, Management, and Responsibilities*

RI Department of State | State Archives & Public
Records Administration



About Us

The Rhode Island State Archives and Public Records Administration is part of the Division of Archives, Library, and Public Information within the Office of the Secretary of State. We are responsible for the following:

- The State Archives preserves and makes available for research Rhode Island's historical public records from 1638 - present;
- The Public Records Administration provides records management assistance and storage services to state agencies; and
- We also provide advice on records management to Local Government.



Purpose and Scope

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- Definitions
- Benefits and challenges
- Digital records management
- Preservation
- How we can help



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Definitions

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- Public records
- Born digital records
- Digitized records
- Obsolescence
- Records management
- Records Control Schedules



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Is it a public record?

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The crucial factor in deciding whether a document is a public record depends on its function and contents, not the physical means used to create, send, and keep the document. (Reference: R.I. Gen. Laws § 38-1-1.1).

Questions to ask yourself:

1. Do the contents concern public business?
2. Does it serve a public function?
3. Whose office is it from?



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When is it not a public record?

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- Duplicate copies used for convenience or reference
- E-mail received as part of a distribution list
- Miscellaneous, notifications of meetings, holidays, charitable campaigns, meeting room reservations, etc.
- Casual communications and personal messages
- Any record that does not document, or is not related to, the transaction of government business.



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Benefits

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- Create and edit documents instantly;
- Fast location, retrieval, and distribution;
- Ease of communication;
- Business processes improvement;
- Economy and storage – less physical footprint;
- Multiple media options; and
- Information sharing opportunities.



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Challenges

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- Information overload;
- Authenticity and reliability issues;
- Security and privacy concerns;
- Obsolescence;
- Continual investment of time and budget;
- Volume and disorganization of information; and
- Version control and maintaining platforms.



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Good records management

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- Ability to properly perform the core mission;
- Effectively retrieve and dispose records;
- Ensure regulatory compliance;
- Safeguard important information;
- Cut costs and become more efficient;
- Better management decision making;
- Preserve agency knowledge; and
- Control the generation and growth of records.



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Poor records management

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- An inability to properly perform the core mission;
- An inability to resume operations after a disaster;
- Legal penalties for failure to find and produce records;
- Public distrust due to inability to produce controversial or requested records;
- Costs for remediation of damaged records that have not yet met retention; and
- An inability to find pertinent information.



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Responsibilities

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1. You create the record;
2. You classify the record;
3. You store the record; and
4. You maintain the record.

